Stimulus: Ray Batty's monologue at the end of the 1982 film Blade Runner.

Theme: What makes us human?

Word count: 1971

The question of “what makes us human”, of how best to define ourselves, our largest possible self may be one of the first questions ever pondered that down the road lead to the beginning of philosophy. And from Plato’s very well known “Featherless biped” to any biological or scientific definition of it we may find nowadays on the internet, the focus of that question has shifted, as society has changed and evolved, and we have experienced unspeakable horrors beyond our comprehension and made machines eerily similar to ourselves, the question of Humanity is clearly not just saying that you belong to the *Homo sapiens sapiens* species, as rational and devoid of mysticism and religion as we may like to think of ourselves, why do we classify abhorrent actions as “inhumane” when everyone involved in the abhorrent act, from the perpetrator to the bystander to the victim, was member of the *homo sapiens sapiens*, or when we attach human-like qualities or properties to non-human things or being, like the compassion and loyalty of dogs, who as Federico García Lorca in his play “La casa de Bernarda Alba” said: “[...] but some dogs, with more heart than many creatures [...]”. Therefore, there must be some harder-to-find humaneness or human condition linked to our own belonging to our very own species.

As with everything, there are a million and one ways to approach the topic of humanness, and advances in technology such as artificial intelligence and robotics have proven themselves one such point of contention in the issue of what is human. In the beginning of philosophy, dualist thinkers such as Pythagoras or Plato maintained that every human being was formed by two entities: a body, a mechanism, a vessel for the second element: a soul. Nowadays the concept of “Soul” is irreparably welded to religion and spiritual practice and institutions; but science has in a way answered part of the question of humanness, within the frame of our time and in regards to other species we share a planet with. That is that our intelligence, or perception of self is what most differentiates us from our more animalistic planet-mates, and in a way, this advanced intellect could be interpreted as a more rational version of Plato’s soul, some untraceable thing that if we lacked, we would not be having this conversation.

As I previously stated, the inexorable passage of time has modified the meaning of that question, as open up points of contention for humans to squabble over some millenia down the line. Advances in the sciences has opened wide a door in the question of “What makes us human”, and standing in the door was a carbon copy or ourselves, a reflection without a mirror, the only thing differentiating us was that our reflection did not have a a heart, guts, bones, flesh or a semblance of a brain, only pure, hardened metal was to be found underneath it’s skin. Robots, especially robots equipped with human-like intelligence or in some cases superior intelligence, have offered us the possibility of granting the status of “human” to an organism that not only is not of our own species, but that without our discoveries and ingenuity wouldn’t exist, our metaphorical offspring.

Within this framework is the question of “What makes us human” pondered and tackled in the 1982 film “Blade runner”. Within the confines of that film and the relation between machine and man I plan to answer to the best of my abilities the question of “What makes us human”. With a special interest put in a speech made by one of the characters of the movie, Roy Batty, near the end of the film.

But before we can fully commence with answering the question and analysing how the film tries to answer it, I wish to give some more context on the movie. As I previously mentioned,

Blade Runner was released in 1982, it was directed by Ridley Scott and was based on the science fiction classic “Do androids dream of electric sheep?” by american author Philip K. Dick. The plot is set in the distant year of 2019, when robotics have become so advanced that the humanity has been able to make robots identical in any and all ways to humans, but with special abilities such as superhuman strength and agility, these kinds of androids are called “Replicants”, and are used as slave labourers on off-earth human colonies. Because of their human levels of intelligence and superhuman strength, there is always the threat of a revolt, and as such they have been outlawed on earth, and equipped with a lifespan of only three years, but equipped with artificial memories and personalities. The film follows Los Angeles Police Department officer Rick Deckard (Played by Harrison Ford and referred only as “Deckard” in the movie) as he is ordered to “retire” (kill) a group of replicants that bordered a ship, killed it’s crew and then landed on Earth. In this task he is assisted by the Tyrell Corporation, the main manufacturer of replicants. He picks off every member of the replicant group as they themselves try to find a cure to their incredibly limited lifespans. Near the very end of the movie he is cornered by the leader and last member of the group, Roy Batty, who is himself in the process of dying, and he delivers the following speech:

“I've seen things you people wouldn't believe... Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion... I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain... Time to die.”

Many things relevant to the questions posed in the movie are revealed in this single speech. Another moral point the film raises is “Why does the character hunt down the replicants if they’re practically human?”; and to this the movie itself presents us with counter-arguments, such as the memories the replicants have been implanted (and common to all replicants) and that they don’t dream. In the quoted speech, Roy is referring to the whole of humanity when he says “you people”, despite Deackrd being the only one present. I think that what Roy is trying to do is provide evidence for his humanity. The things he describes are impossible, even in the far future (of 2019) those aren’t things someone (let alone an android) just experiences in their lifetime. Thus, he is describing his dreams, things he has imagined, made up, he is capable of imagination, creative creation; and at the same time he acknowledges their disappearance from his memory once he dies, and that they are but a single drop in the ocean (or tears in rain, as he puts it) that is the individual experiences every human has had.

Now while I may rant on and on about how our current view of the human condition may be challenged as we meet or create beings as intelligent as us, It would be wiser to look at how proper philosophers have tried to approach this contentious topic. For this task I have chosen Paul-Michel Focault and Hannah Arendt as the two philosophers who’s thought I will study and try to apply to this question.

Paul-Michel Focault was born on the 15th of October 1926 and died on the 25th of June 1984, and while the focus of this philosophy was the phenomenon of *power*, he pioneered on what we would today call “gender studies”, he was also very politically active. His thoughts on the idea of man, or “humanity” as we are posing it in this question were the same as he had on many other issues such as gender, (in)sanity, and so on; that it didn’ exist. It was a social construct, an idea made up only in the most recent centuries, and that as with many philosophical or psychological trends, it will disappear. This has many and

profound consequences, because if you have nothing in common with the man sitting next to you, what is stopping you from murdering him? What value do morals have if they're a passing fad and of no value at all? Thus, we can infer that Focault would think that this debate is utterly pointless, that there is no humanity we can appeal to in the case of intelligent artificial life. But, Foucault is not entirely wrong, it is undeniable that the idea of a universal community of all human beings is relatively new, and definitely the result of a theoretical experiment, but there is also every reason to fully support the idea of a humanity, a condition of our existence that helps us feel connected to our neighbour and links us together, forcing us to empathise.

Johanna Arendt (14th of October 1906 - 4th of December 1975) was a German-American philosopher whose work mainly focused on totalitarianism, the decline of democracy and the concept of human rights. She is most known today for her account of the trial of Adolf Eichmann, one of the main architects of the holocaust. But she also dabbled on the human condition; the fact of being human, which she tied to our existence on earth. Earth, our own planet is all we've ever known and the only place where we can live without the help of any machinery, and being human is being earth-bound. Arendt lived through the space race, and considered the launch of the satellite Sputnik the second most important invention of mankind after the telescope. The more we try to abandon our Earth and become a multi-planetary space-faring civilization, the more of our humanity, of ourselves we lose. But being human is also searching for progress, scientific advantage, and the eventual abandonment of Earth; so we could see it as a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy, where we are eventually destined to lose our humanity, humanness, as we adventure further into the unknown of space. This makes sense, in the same way the Foucault theory makes sense, because being Earth-bound has been a cornerstone fact of our existence, the inherent limitation that comes with not having any other planet to inhabit (this has come into focus more recently with the "there is no planet B" protests that have taken place all over the world in the wake of a climate disaster). How can we relate this to Blade Runner and Roy Batty's speech? Well, we are told in the movie's introduction that replicants are used in *off-world* colonies as slave labour, and characters often talk about going *off-world*, so it is all but confirmed that in the world of Blade Runner, humanity has become a multi-planetary species; so we have reached beyond the point of humanity, fulfilling that prophecy of abandoning Earth, and because of that, none of the characters of the story are actually human, but something completely different, and as was the case with Foucault, the debate is rendered pointless.

Let us now finally reach a conclusion to this debate. It has been really unfortunate that all of the philosophers selected for this essay have posed theories about the human condition that nullify the question of this essay. However, for the purposes of the very existence of this study, we can't lend credit to them. And such, however irrelevant my opinion may be in relation to the philosophical giants I have described, I will attempt to give you an answer to the question: what makes us human? In my response I have attempted to extend it to the idea of replicants as shown in the movie, as I have talked long about how the movie proves that they are human. So, my definition of human is: "A living thing capable of showing emotion and that is aware of its own death". I know this definition has flaws, but that's not my purpose.

Thank you for reading.

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